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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000381

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [GZ](#) [IS](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: PA SECURITY FORCES BEGIN DEPLOYING IN NORTHERN GAZA

Classified By: Pol/C Norm Olsen for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: A force of some 2,000 PA security personnel began deploying in the northeastern Gaza Strip, near Bayt Hanoun and Bayt Lahiya January 21 in an agreed-upon effort between the IDF and Gaza security chief Mousa Arafat aimed at preventing rocket fire at Israeli towns. Observers on the ground report that the numbers should be sufficient to the task at hand and that the men themselves appear confident they will be able to accomplish their mission without a strong challenge from the militants, as they believe Abu Mazen has come to "understanding" with these groups not to launch attacks. One journalist, however, reported that she came across members of one Fatah splinter group assessing the seriousness of the PA's effort to stop their activity. Other Fatah-affiliated militants have let it be known that unless all militant groups agree to stop their actions simultaneously, they will not abide by any cease-fire. They argue that absent a full cease-fire, the GOI will continue to target them. End Summary.

Boots on the Ground

2. (SBU) Confirming Israeli media reports, Ministry of Interior DG for Community Affairs Abdulsamia Efrangi told Poloff January 21 that approximately 2,000 PA security personnel in total were beginning to deploy in northern Gaza to prevent rocket fire at Israel emanating from the area around Bayt Hanoun. In response to Poloff's question, Efrangi clarified that, given the 24-hour nature of the task at hand, the 2,000-man deployment translates into some 500-700 personnel on the ground at any one time. Efrangi added that the number initially deployed January 21 could be smaller than 500, as Palestinians celebrate the second day of the Eid al-Adha holiday. On the ground visual inspection by international personnel and journalists January 21 appeared to confirm that number. Movement restrictions through Abu Khouli and the ensuing difficulty of gathering forces together in the north were also cited as possible reasons for a slightly more drawn-out deployment. Any slight delay in deployment notwithstanding, Efrangi claimed that Mousa Arafat is determined that the deployment succeed. "It is his big test," Efrangi said.

3. (SBU) UNSECOORD representative in Gaza Simon Butt assessed that the 2,000 personnel announced by the PA are sufficient to the task of securing the Bayt Hanoun area. Butt said that additional forces would be required if the PA decides to secure the area around Khan Yunis, some 15 miles away, to prevent mortar and rocket attacks against the Katif settlement bloc. Khan Yunis is well known as an area where residents are actively hostile to the PA, whereas residents of Bayt Hanoun are, on the contrary, appealing for order and protection from Israeli retaliation generated by the militant activity there.

4. (SBU) The number of rockets fired within and from Gaza dropped dramatically in the two days prior to the deployment and following the barrage of rockets attacks January 15-18 that killed an Israeli teenager in Sderot and injured several other people. Israeli and Palestinian commentators viewed the high rate of militant attacks as an attempt by the militant groups to strengthen their positions prior to the resumption of talks with Abu Mazen, now currently underway. Gazans with whom Poloff spoke ascribed the drop in no small part to the onset of the Eid al-Adha holiday.

PA Security and Militants Both Appear Confident

5. (C) NYT stringer Taghreed el-Khodary told Poloff that she traveled along with a PA security team the morning of January 21 as they deployed on the outskirts of Bayt Hanoun, well known as a location from which militants fire Qassams into Israel. El-Khodary said that the troops appeared confident that they were up to the task of securing the area. Asked how they would respond to attempts by militants to fire rockets from the area under their control, the troops reportedly said they would "carry out their duties" without hesitation. That being said, team members also expressed the belief that their leadership had "come to an agreement" with Hamas not to launch attacks and that they would not be seriously challenged. Whether or not the agreement is

public, el-Khodary concluded, these men were confident that it was, indeed, in place.

16. (C) El-Khodary told Poloff that while observing the deployment of PA security forces near the Erez Crossing, she had met a "carload" of Aymon Juda militants (nominally under the umbrella of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades) who were out doing the same thing. The militants, according to the journalist, made no attempt to dissemble when she questioned them about their purpose: they were there to observe and determine whether the deployment is "serious."

All or Nothing

17. (C) Gaza journalist Nidal al-Mughrabi, who also has good access to al-Aqsa faction leaders, told Poloff recently that, based on conversations with several commanders, he understood that the Fatah factions would indeed be ready to sign on to a cease-fire, but only/only if all militant groups, including the Fatah splinter groups sign on simultaneously. The commanders also demanded that they be guaranteed both jobs and safety from Israeli attack. Without the full basket, there would be no deal. Al-Mughrabi said that the more radical organizations such as the Popular Resistance Committees, Fatah Hawks and Abu Rish Brigades are less inclined to agree.

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